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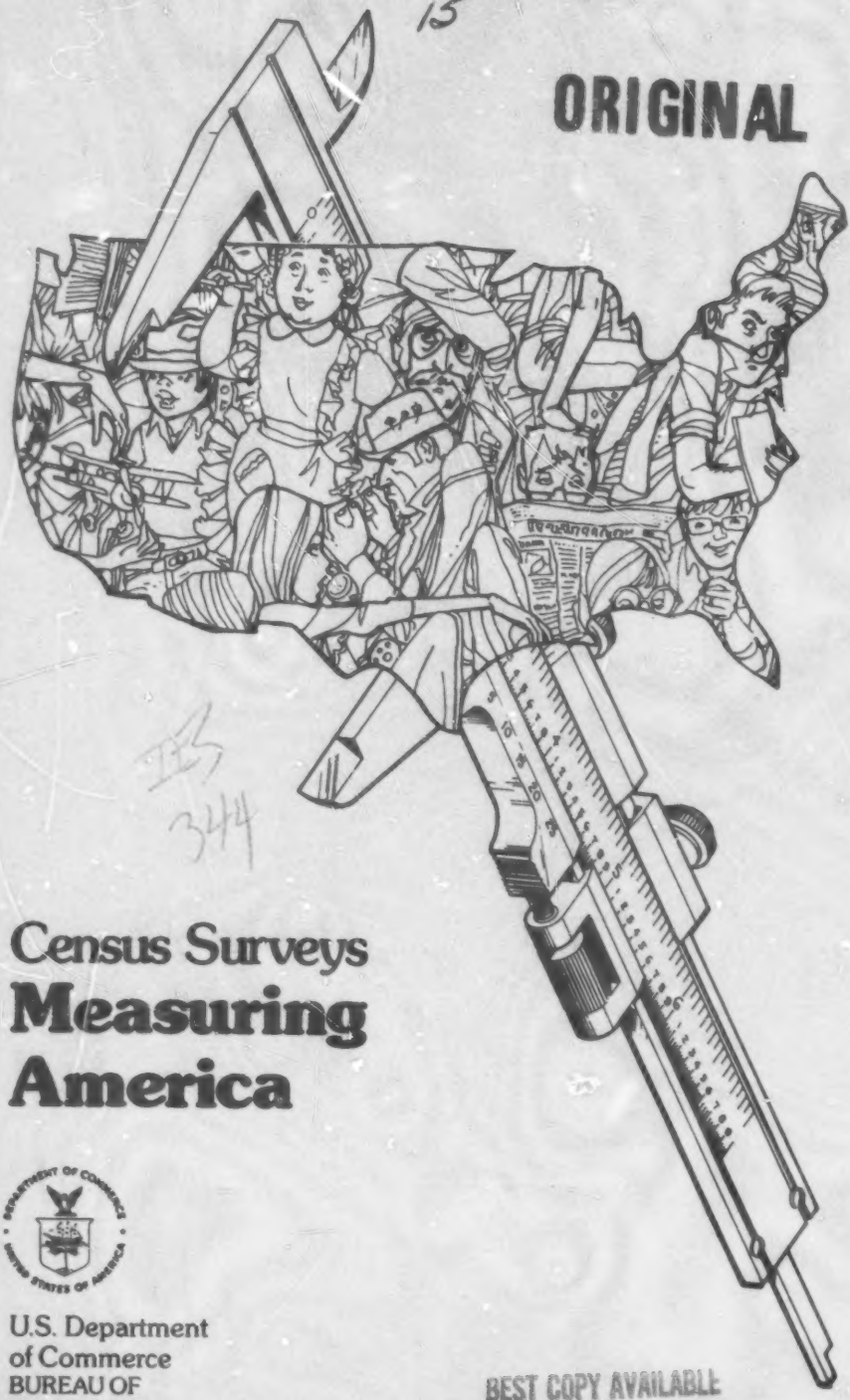

Census Surveys **Measuring America**

U.S. Department of Commerce
BUREAU OF THE CENSUS

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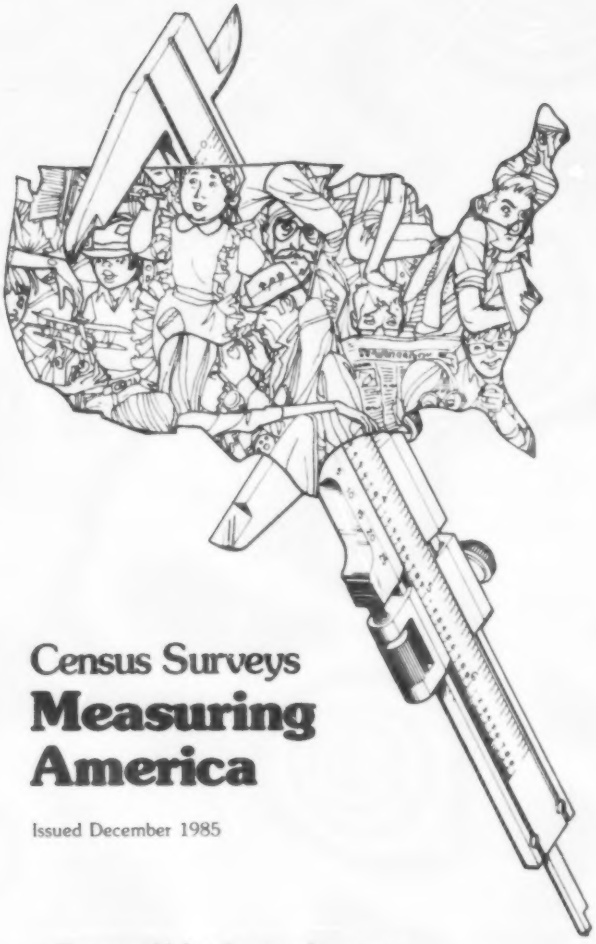

Census Surveys
Measuring America

Issued December 1985

—If we could first know where we are, and whither we are tending, we could better judge what to do, and how to do it. . .

Abraham Lincoln

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INTRODUCTION

What does the Census Bureau do the other 9 years?

Many Americans ask that question. Just about everyone knows that the Census Bureau conducts the decennial census of population and housing every 10 years. Not everyone realizes, however, that the Bureau is busy taking the economic and social pulse of the Nation every working day, year after year.

Some people know about the Bureau's day-by-day, week-by-week activities because they have taken part in them. They may have participated in one or another of the censuses the Bureau conducts every 5 years—on agriculture, on State and local governments, and on economic activities which cover the retail trade, wholesale trade, selected service industries, construction industries, manufacturing, mineral industries, and transportation. They may have participated in one of the special censuses the Bureau conducts for cities, towns, villages, counties, townships, and school districts needing up-to-date population or housing figures. Or, they may have responded to one of the hundreds of surveys the Bureau conducts throughout every year on a variety of other subjects.

Congress has given the Census Bureau, an agency of the U.S. Department of Commerce, an unending mission: to compile statistical information about the population and major social and economic trends in the Nation. Surveys provide a very effective tool for obtaining this information.

As in the decennial population census and other censuses, all data collected in surveys are held in strictest confidence. Every Bureau employee is sworn to secrecy and is subject to severe fine or imprisonment for violating the oath. No fact relating to any individual, firm, or institution participating in a survey can be made public. The law is unequivocal, and it has never been abused. All answers to the questionnaires and the reports submitted to the Bureau are separated from any personal or organizational identification as they are processed and are released only as statistical summaries.

Lifeless as those statistics may seem at first glance, they are translated every day into public and private programs and policies that ultimately affect all Americans. Results of the more than 250

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surveys conducted by the Bureau in a typical year appear in a vast number of publications that no other governmental or private organization is equipped to duplicate. Currently, the Bureau puts out an average of 10 reports each working day for a total of 220,000 pages a year. This output ranges from a 2-page press release on monthly wholesale sales and inventories to the more than 1,000-page, fact-filled Statistical Abstract of the United States, published annually since 1878. Nearly 3,000 publications are presently listed in the Census Bureau Catalog. Data are also available on microfiche and on magnetic tape for the increasing number of data users who have computers.

Survey results appear regularly in newspaper and magazine articles and are broadcast just as often on radio and television. Data resulting from surveys are the basis of the well-known monthly reports on unemployment and the cost of living. They provide source materials for reports on construction and retail trade as well as on population estimates and projections, and on movement of the population from one place to another.

What Surveys Are

Many Census Bureau surveys are recurring—that is, they are conducted at regular or irregular intervals. For instance, the Current Population Survey (CPS), the largest of all Bureau surveys, involves interviews at some 72,000 households every month. The households which take part in a recurring survey are changed from time to time, but the survey goes on indefinitely.

Other surveys are conducted only once; these one-time projects often supply vital current information about an emerging problem.

All surveys must serve a clear public need. Many are assigned to the Bureau by law or custom. Others are sponsored and paid for by other government agencies. For example, data on health and medical care are obtained from the National Health Interview Survey conducted by the Bureau for the Department of Health and Human Services. The range of surveys is as wide as the variety of needs met by the resulting data.

How Surveys Are taken

Surveys differ from censuses in two major respects. First, they are not designed to canvass an entire population—only a sample. And, second, although participation in all censuses is mandatory, response to surveys is voluntary in most cases.

As already mentioned, the CPS reaches about 72,000 of the Nation's 84 million households each month. Other surveys involve even fewer interviews. Why a sample? Between censuses, it would cost too much in time and taxpayer money to visit every household and business place. Therefore, population samples are scientifically selected so that each address represents many similar units. In this way, an authentic cross section of households, in-

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dividuals, or whatever group is being surveyed, results. Information obtained from this kind of cross section is extremely valuable when applied to the Nation as a whole or to large areas such as major geographic regions.

Now— let's examine a "sample" of Census Bureau surveys.

Recurring Surveys

Current Population Survey

The CPS, the oldest of the Bureau's surveys, is one of the most important sources of timely population information available. Conducted since 1940, it allows the Bureau to make available to government, industry, and the general public, current data about social and economic conditions in the United States. Data collected cover a wide range of subjects about the population—work experience, education, migration, family size and composition, births, income, and housing vacancies.

The primary focus for CPS is the collection of labor force data. Monthly statistics about employment and unemployment, including the monthly unemployment rate, are analyzed and published by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor. In addition to the publication of national and regional data, State and metropolitan statistical area data are also published on a quarterly or annual average basis. The survey also provides additional labor force data not available through other sources.

In addition, CPS...

- Is the only comprehensive source of information on the personal characteristics of the labor force such as age and sex, race, marital and family status, veteran status, and educational background.
- Is the primary source of estimates of the numbers of wage and salaried employees as well as self-employed persons, domestic help, and unpaid helpers in nonfarm family enterprises.
- Provides the only available data on the number of workers classified by the number of hours worked, which permits separate analysis of part-time employees, those on overtime, and those in similar categories.
- Is the only comprehensive current source of information on the occupational categories of workers—whether engineers, stenographers, carpenters, farmers, laborers, or whatever. It also provides limited statistics on the industries in which these people work and their usual earnings.
- Provides information about persons outside the labor force, known as the labor reserve: whether they are married women with or without young children, disabled persons, students, veterans, older retired workers, or in circumstances of special interest.

CPS data are used by many agencies of government and private industry. For example, such key indicators as the monthly employment and unemployment estimates play important roles in shaping

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decisions of the President, Congress, the Council of Economic Advisors, and the Federal Reserve Board.

Another example is the application of CPS data to manpower problems. Under the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA), paid training is provided for the unemployed through state and local governments and the private sector. CPS statistics are used to determine the extent of unemployment in any given industry and for any given occupation. In this way, unemployed people can be trained for positions in industries with vacant jobs.

How else are CPS data used and by whom? In the following ways:

- Vocational guidance groups, trade unions, and organizations concerned with minority groups look to CPS results to determine job opportunities for the people they represent.
- Facts about the living standards of persons with low incomes are developed from the CPS. Are these people unemployed? Of a certain racial group? Retired? In large families? In families headed by women? Living on farms? Living in central cities? CPS data help identify the characteristics of the poor so that programs to help raise their income levels can be undertaken.
- To help persons involved with educational planning, CPS provides data on public and private school enrollment trends from nursery school through college, and on the numbers and characteristics of those who have dropped out of school.
- To determine benefits for veterans. War veterans of the United States are eligible for various benefits. To anticipate the amount of money required to pay for veterans' educational benefits, hospital care, and retirement benefits, planners rely upon CPS estimates of the number of persons eligible to receive such benefits.
- To plan old-age benefits. CPS supplies data on the age distribution and family status of people across the United States. The information is used to determine the amount of Social Security and state old-age benefits required for those eligible.
- The data are valuable to private industry, too. Baby food and children's clothing manufacturers use CPS figures on new marriages and ages of children to plan changes in production capacity and marketing techniques. Many of the large corporations use CPS data for marketing studies.

Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP)

The Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) provides information on all sources of cash and noncash income, and eligibility for and participation in government transfer programs. It gathers data on disability, labor force status, assets and liabilities, pensions, and health coverage, as well as family

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characteristics such as size, composition, and income. Each household in the sample is visited three times a year over a 2½ year period.

The information shows how closely tied are changes in peoples' lives and their economic situation, such as a teenager's changeover from student to worker, a homemaker never before employed who trains for and then seeks a job, or an older person who makes the switch from worker to retiree.

Examples of data collected in the SIPP.

1. Monthly Household Income

A household's cash income, the most common measure of economic well-being, often is related to other household characteristics such as race, regional location, and age of the householder.

2. Program Participation

This survey examines participation in programs such as Social Security, Railroad Retirement, unemployement compensation, food stamps, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), and public housing. One of the SIPP's main goals is to generate information such as the relationship of monthly income to program participation.

For example, information collected in 1984 showed that households receiving unemployment compensation had an average monthly income of $1,906 during the second quarter of 1984. Those households receiving Social Security or Railroad Retirement had an average monthly income of $1,590 and those receiving AFDC or other cash assistance show an average monthly income of $864. The average income of residents of public housing was $754 and households receiving food stamps had an average monthly income of $641.

3. Labor Force Activity

Data from the SIPP compare household income with the labor force status of its members. Out of 84 million total nonfarm households, 56.2 million had one or more members working in the second quarter of 1984 (with no one seeking work or laid off). These households had an average monthly income of $2,740. There were 9 million households with one or more members looking for work or on layoff. These households had an average monthly income of $1,739. The third group of households, 18.7 million with non members in the labor force, had an average monthly income of $1,076.

4. Asset Ownership

SIPP produces data on the most common forms of asset ownership such as savings ac-

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counts and home ownership as well as less common forms such as rental property and royalties.

American Housing Survey

The American Housing Survey (AHS) was developed in 1973 in response to a long-standing need for frequent and up-to-date information on the nation's housing supply.

The availability of adequate housing for the Nation's growing population is of mounting concern. Information about the physical condition of occupied and vacant units is essential. This survey also helps to measure changes in the housing inventory resulting from losses, new construction, mobile home placements, and demographic characteristics of the occupants.

The survey bridges the gap in current housing information between decennial censuses. There are two parts involved: One is a national sample, conducted biennially, of approximately 62,000 units. The second consists of 222,000 units in 44 standard metropolitan statistical areas (MSA's) which are interviewed annually over a 4-year period.

The Bureau conducts this survey for the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Under the Federal Housing Act, HUD must provide current data on the state of housing in the United States. Survey data also are used by Congress and other government agencies responsible for establishing policy and administering housing laws.

Health Surveys

Healthy people are one of the Nation's greatest resources. Health's priority is justified whether viewed in terms of the cost of illness or of the less tangible benefits of national vigor, morale, individual well-being, and other human values. It follows that comprehensive health statistics are needed to keep track of this vital resource.

The major Bureau efforts to obtain useful health information are the Health Interview Survey, and the Hospital Discharge Survey, both conducted for the National Center for Health Statistics of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

In the Health Interview Survey, information is collected through household interviews. This survey currently reaches about 48,000 households every year. The sample is representative of the whole civilian population, excluding those in institutions. The data include facts on health and on population characteristics related to illness, injury, and disability, as well as the uses of medical services.

Hospital Discharge Survey information is collected from a sample of all short-stay hospital patients. It provides national statistics on patients who are representative of the hospital experience of the civilian population. Results are used to determine the nature and extent of illnesses diagnosed and treated

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in hospitals as well as the amount of in-hospital care required relative to the final diagnosis and age of the patient. The HDS also measures the utilization of existing hospitals and indicates the areas where there is the greatest need for new hospitals.

The health surveys provide information for many purposes, including:

1. Planning and evaluation of official and voluntary programs—Public health officials use survey statistics to identify and rank problems of public health and to determine how resources should be used. Figures showing trends in disease outbreak or control help to design and evaluate prevention programs and to determine effectiveness of new treatments.

2. Evaluation of medical and dental services—Health data help to estimate the need for hospital and rehabilitation services and to identify areas of emphasis in medical and nursing training. Statistics on the frequency of chronic disease, injuries, and resulting disabilities are important in considering expansion of medical insurance and employee compensation programs. The surveys are important to the whole field of medical economics. Data are gathered on the number of people covered by various insurance plans, methods of payment, and the degree to which various income and occupation groups use medical services.

3. Medical research—The health surveys provide data needed to investigate factors related to disease such as age, sex, marital status, occupation, and economic status. Statistics are also compiled on the geographic distribution of such health problems as allergies, nutritional diseases, and nephritis to provide clues as to their causes.

4. Manpower problems and civilian defense—Statistics are gathered on absenteeism resulting from disease and injury for use in estimating economic loss to industry. Information is also compiled on the number of persons with chronic diseases and handicapping conditions. Together with data on employment status, this provides an estimate of potential additions to the labor force. For the armed services, an estimate can be made of the number of young men who might serve in limited-duty categories. For the use of both industry and the armed services, data are collected on the personnel and facilities required to correct handicaps.

5. Needs of drug firms and appliance manufacturers—Data on disabilities, the frequency of particular operations, use of hearing aids, artificial limbs, etc., help drug firms estimate markets for their preparations and appliances.

6. Public health education—Finally, accident prevention agencies use health survey figures to estimate the national incidence of accidental injuries by type and degree. Statistics are gathered on the number of cases of cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis, blindness, deafness, and other diseases and impairments, for

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use by health agencies concerned with these conditions. Much of the information is used in planning advertising campaigns for public health education.

National Crime Survey

Crime in the United States is a matter of national concern. The National Crime Survey (NCS) is an effort: (1) to measure the amount of certain kinds of crimes, both reported and not reported to law enforcement agencies; (2) to obtain data on the socioeconomic characteristics of the victims of crime; and (3) to collect detailed information on the circumstances of crimes beyond what is available in law enforcement agency records.

The survey consists of a sample of 60,000 households. People in the sample are asked if they were victims of crime during the 6-month period prior to the interview.

Publications based on the NCS include:

Annual estimates of change in the incidence of crime, showing change from year to year.

Annual estimates of the number of households touched by crime.

Detailed annual reports showing the characteristics of victims, offenders, crime incidents, and other detailed information on an aggregate basis.

Periodic reports on special topics

The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) of the U.S. Department of Justice uses results of this survey to determine the extent, distribution, and nature of crime in the United States. Such knowledge is useful in planning grants of funds or providing advice to local law enforcement agencies and in evaluating the effect of financial grants or new programs on the rate of crime. Also, the results will be used by criminal justice planners, researchers, academicians, and the public for research into the characteristics of crime and for planning to meet future needs of the criminal justice system.

Current Business Reports

To complete the picture of the nation's economy, data about business must be added to knowledge of consumer income and spending. The Census Bureau makes a major contribution through its Current Business Reports (CBR) program.

Firms participating in these surveys constitute a valid cross-section of the approximately 1.9 million retail and 1.6 million service establishments. Both large and small businesses, new and old firms, are included in the sample. The sample consists of two parts—the list sample canvassed by mail and the area sample canvassed by field interviewers.

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The Retail Trade Survey covers all categories of retail business—food stores, eating and drinking places, general merchandise and department stores, variety and apparel stores, furniture and appliance dealers, lumberyards and building materials dealers, hardware stores, new and used car dealers, gasoline service stations, etc. Data are published in the Monthly Retail Trade report, which provides estimated national and regional sales figures by kind of business. The report shows month-to-month and year-to-year percentage changes in sales, by kind of business, for the nation and for selected areas.

The Bureau also publishes a retail trade report showing annual sales and year-end inventories of retail stores, by kind of business.

The Service Annual Survey provides annual estimates of receipts for selected service trades, including hotels and motels, personal services, business services, automobile and other repair services, and amusement and recreation services. These are published in the Service Annual Surveys report.

Reports on business statistics have a wide audience. The President's Council of Economic Advisors, the Federal Reserve Board, and other governmental agencies use the data as reliable indicators of how well the nation's economy is functioning. If business slows down, the data show the seriousness of the situation and, if necessary, action can be taken to stimulate the economy. Conversely, if the data indicate inflationary pressures, governmental agencies can take action to curb them.

Newspapers and periodicals obtain the current business reports as soon as they are released and base articles on them. The reports are also studied by officials of business firms, labor and trade associations, market research groups, educational institutions, the communications media and private individuals.

Business statistics published in these reports include:

Measures of competitive standing. The businessman, whether a corporation executive or neighborhood storekeeper, can determine the extent to which changes in the volume of his business reflect general conditions and thus the extent to which they indicate a rise or fall in his competitive position.

Decision guides. Businessmen apply the data to decisions on opening new outlets, discontinuing or consolidating present outlets, and adding or dropping merchandise lines.

Market locators. Manufacturers, retailers, wholesalers, advertising agencies, and others consult data on trends in various parts of the country in order to gear their production and sales efforts to market demand. Costs are lowered when production, distribution, and retail marketing are linked more closely to demand. Increased knowledge of demand also helps avoid costly inventory losses.

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Research tools. Many trade and professional associations analyze and interpret the statistics to guage the significance of up and down movements within their groups. They package the information according to the needs of members. Specialized publications render the same valuable service to all kinds of business enterprises.

Economic reports in the Nation's press do not always label the sources of their data clearly, but much of it, credited or not, comes from the Census Bureau. Without these reports, there would be a huge gap in our knowledge of the strengths or weaknesses in the American marketplace.

Survey of Construction

The impact of the construction industry upon the American economy and, in particular, on the livelihoods of millions of Americans is profound. Through the monthly Survey of Construction, information is collected from home builders and real estate agents on the number and types of housing units started and sold each month. One part, involving 2,000 buildings each month, determines how long new apartments stay on the market before they are rented.

Expenditures for private residential construction in the United States are currently running at the rate of about $145 billion per year. The monthly Survey of Construction (SOC) provides information on this segment of the economy. Such agencies as the President's Council of Economic Advisors, the Federal Reserve Board, and the Department of Housing and Urban Development make extensive use of these data. In private industry, accurate housing construction data are needed by such groups as the Mortgage Bankers' Association, the National Association of Mutual Savings Banks, savings and loan institutions, and others. The National Association of Home Builders uses survey results to help set reasonable industry goals.

Manufacturers of building and construction materials and manufacturers of household furnishings and appliances use SOC figures extensively, too. For example, a manufacturer of washing machines might increase production on the basis of Bureau survey figures showing an increase in the number of new housing units being started.

One objective of SOC is to provide data for estimating the number of housing units started—both in areas that issue building permits and areas that do not. Housing starts information is published in the monthly Construction Report, Series C20, Housing Starts.

SOC also provides such data on housing sales as the monthly volume of sales of new single-family houses, the number of unsold new homes on the market, sales prices, type of financing, physical characteristics of housing, and inclusion of major appliances. Figures on housing sales also provide the basic data needed to calculate the price index of new one-family homes sold. These data are published in the Construction Report, Series C25, New One-Family Homes Sold and For Sale

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and in Series C27, Price Index of New One-Family Houses Sold.

A third objective of the survey is to provide data on the number of single-family houses and apartment buildings completed and under construction each month. This information is published in the Construction Report, Series C22, Housing Completions.

Other data available include the cost of apartment projects, placements of mobile homes for residential use and the value of new housing construction put in place each month.

Cotton Survey

Cotton is one of the country's principal crops. Many people, in cities as well as on farms, need to know how much cotton is being produced at any given time and how much is being used or held in storage.

This information is essential to cotton growers, to everyone in the cotton textile industry, and to all those who depend on cotton for a livelihood. It is also vital to many government agencies and the millions of people they serve in agriculture, transportation, consumer information, employment, investment, and research. To serve these people, the Bureau gathers and publishes statistics on cotton.

The law authorizing the collection of data on cotton ginned, consumed, and on hand recognize the need to guard against any speculative influence on market prices. With reliable information on the quantity of cotton available, the producer has a guide as to when to dispose of his products and how to plan succeeding crops. The manufacturer likewise has information to assist him in purchasing or contracting for the manufacture and delivery of goods.

Reports of cotton ginned were initiated by an act of Congress approved in 1902. The scope of the Bureau's cotton statistical work was enlarged by a 1912 act providing for monthly reports of cotton consumed and on hand. Today, the reports cover 3,200 active gins.

Timing is important. Bureau Regional Offices have about 6 days to obtain reports from the ginners. These are collected twice a month from September through January and once in August, February, and March. Summaries are wired to Washington, D.C., where they are assembled and compiled by the Bureau's Agriculture Division. Special precautions are taken to insure that security information about the crop is kept confidential until the results are ready for official release.

The first report, for August through January, is released simultaneously by the Department of Agriculture and Commerce. A copy is sent immediately to the Commerce Department's printing office where it is printed and mailed to subscribers. The second report provides interim data for each month in which the statistics are collected. Ginnings and production by States and counties are shown in a summary bulletin at the end of each cotton season.

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Job Training Longitudinal Survey (JTLS)

The Job Training Longitudinal Survey obtains data that are used by the Labor Department's Employment and Training Administration to assess the educational and training programs funded by the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA).

Four times a year the Census Bureau interviews a sample of persons enrolled in JTPA programs to determine how their employment and income are affected by their participation in a JTPA program. The survey records the types of services received from the JTPA programs—classroom instruction, skill-building, trade-learning, job referral, etc.—as well as the work history, income, and demographic characteristics of the people who received JTPA assistance.

Consumer Expenditure Surveys

The Consumer Price Index (CPI) is a leading economic indicator reflecting the changing prices for items purchased by consumers. This monthly statistic is essential in measuring the extent of inflation in the country and the impact on the cost of living of the American consumer.

The Consumer Expenditure Survey monitors changes in prices paid for items by the public. These statistics are essential in measuring the extent of inflation in the Nation and its impact on the cost of living. Information from this survey is used by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, to revise the Consumer Price Index.

The Consumer Expenditure Surveys include the Quarterly Interview Survey, the Diary Survey, and the Point of Purchase Survey.

The Quarterly Interview Survey is conducted monthly through household interviews and provides data on living expenses incurred during the three months prior to the interview.

The Diary Survey, also conducted monthly, collects data on diary forms completed by persons living in a household. They record daily living expenses over two consecutive one-week periods, and results are reported through the Consumer Expenditure Surveys.

The Point of Purchase Survey is conducted annually to identify the kinds of stores and other establishments frequented by consumers as they purchase a variety of goods and services.

Governmental Surveys

Information supplied to the Census Bureau by Federal, State, and local governmental units shows the extent of public spending, revenue, debt, and public employment. Typical resulting reports show that all governmental spending in the 1984 fiscal year totaled $1.4 trillion, up $80 billion from the previous year, and there were about 16 million civilian employees in Federal, State, and local governments.

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